



SENATE REPUBLICAN

POLICY COMMITTEE

Conference Report Highlights

November 14, 2007

Highlights of the Conference Report to Accompany H.R. 1429, the Improving Head Start Readiness Act of 2007

The Conference Report, H. Rept. 109-439, was filed on November 9, 2007.

Noteworthy

- Pursuant to a unanimous consent agreement, at 3:30 p.m. today the Senate will take up the conference report to accompany H.R. 1429 for 60 minutes of debate, equally divided. Upon the use or yielding back of time, the Senate will vote on passage of the conference report.
- On June 19, the Senate passed its version of H.R. 1429 by voice vote. The House passed the Conference Report to accompany H.R. 1429 earlier today by a vote of 381 to 36.
- The conference report authorizes funding of \$7.35 billion in FY 2008, \$7.65 billion in FY 2009, \$7.995 billion in FY 2010 and such sums as necessary for FY 2011 and FY 2012 for the Head Start program, similar to the language that was included in the Senate bill. The Head Start program received \$6.889 billion in FY 2007.
- The Head Start program was last authorized in 1998. Annual appropriations have kept the program operating since its authorization expired in 2003.

Highlights

The Conference Report to accompany H.R. 1429 renews the Head Start program through 2012, raises the income level for which families become eligible for Head Start, increases teacher training and improves fiscal and program management. Key highlights of the conference report include:

Authorization Levels

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Eligibility for Head Start Program

Section 13 of the conference report expands eligibility to allow Head Start grantees to serve children whose parents earn 130 percent above the federal poverty level, not to exceed 35 percent of total enrollment. The conference report also codifies the current practice that allows grantees to serve 10 percent of children over the income eligibility level.

Faith-Based

The conference report maintains references allowing faith-based groups to be designated as Head Start agencies, and to be eligible providers of Head Start programs. This is similar to the provision in the House-passed bill. The Senate bill was silent on the issue.

In its Statement of Administration Policy on the House bill, the Administration asked that the resulting bill “ensure that faith-based organizations are not asked to forfeit their religious hiring autonomy as a condition of receiving Head Start grants.” The conference report did not specifically address this provision.

Funding Formula

The conference report includes a new formula consisting of three steps. The first step will remain constant through the authorization. Subsequent steps will depend upon available funding.

- Step one includes a hold-harmless to all current grantees; \$20 million to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) for research, development and evaluation; \$42 million for monitoring activities by HHS of Head Start grantees; and 2.5 percent to 3 percent for training and technical assistance activities by HHS.

- Step two, based on available funding, provides a cost-of-living adjustment to all existing grantees; \$10 million to Indian Head Start programs which must be used for expansion of the program; and \$10 million for Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs which must be used for expansion of the program.
- Step three, based on available funding, provides 40 percent of the remaining amount for quality improvement activities; 45 percent of the remaining amount for expansion of the program, of which 50 percent will be provided to Head Start and 50 percent for Early Head Start; and 15 percent of the remaining amount will go to states for activities administered by State Advisory Councils.

Teacher Quality

The conference report requires that at least 50 percent of Head Start teachers nationwide in center-based programs have a bachelor's or advanced degree in early childhood education or a related field by September 30, 2013. Additionally, Head Start teaching assistants will be required to have at least a child development associate credential, be enrolled in a program leading to an associate or bachelor's degree or be enrolled in a child development associate credential program to be completed within two years.

The conference report also requires that by September 30, 2010, all teachers providing direct services to children and families participating in Early Head Start programs in Early Head Start centers have a minimum of a child development associate credential and have been trained in early childhood development.

Competition Among Existing Grantees

The conference report requires the Secretary of HHS to establish an expert panel to advise on the development and implementation of a system of renewal of all existing Head Start agencies. The panel is to advise on whether a Head Start grantee is successfully delivering a high-quality and comprehensive Head Start program, and whether the grantee has any unresolved deficiencies during the last triennial review. The agreement requires grantees that fail to meet requirements to compete against other potential grantees when their grants come up for renewal.

Disclosure and Transparency

The conference report requires all Head Start grantees to make publically available an annual report detailing how money was spent, the sources from which funds were received and how the grantee performed in terms of meeting the requirements of the law.

Scientifically-Valid Research

The conference report requires that Head Start curriculum and materials used in Head Start classrooms be based on scientifically-valid research.

Safeguards Against Financial Abuse

The conference report requires Head Start grantees to meet a range of financial disclosure requirements as a condition of receiving and keeping their federal funds. Grantees will have to be overseen by a local governance board that provides direction and actively oversees all program activities, and requires that at least one member of the board have a background and expertise in fiscal management and accounting.

Background

Head Start was created in 1965 to provide comprehensive, early childhood development services to low-income children. Services provided to preschool-aged children include child development, and educational, health, nutritional, social and other activities intended to prepare low-income children for entering kindergarten.

The Head Start program is administered by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), who awards grants directly to local grantees. Head Start programs are locally designed and are administered by a network of over 1,600 public and private nonprofit and for-profit agencies, according to the Congressional Research Service. Head Start grantees include public and private school systems, community agencies and faith-based organizations, in addition to private, nonprofit and for-profit entities, local governments and Indian tribes. Based on HHS data, in FY 2006, funded enrollment for Head Start totaled 909,210 children.

Head Start was last reauthorized in 1998 for FY 1999-FY 2003. Annual appropriations have kept the program operating since its last authorization expired. After unsuccessful attempts to reauthorize Head Start in the 108th and 109th Congresses, on May 2, 2007 the House passed its reauthorization bill, H.R. 1429, by a vote of 365 to 48. The Senate passed its own version of H.R. 1429 by voice vote on June 19, 2007. The Senate-passed bill was similar to S. 556, with a few technical changes. House and Senate conferees filed a conference report (H. Rept. 110-439) on November 9, 2007. The House passed the conference report earlier today by a vote of 381 to 36.